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TAGS: ASEC EAID PREF PHUM SOCI SMIG UN SU
SUBJECT: HAC COMMISSIONER REPORTEDLY ANNOUNCES PLANNED CLOSURE OF
DARFUR IDP CAMPS

REFS: a)05 Khartoum 772; b)07 Khartoum 1680; c)08 Khartoum 1300

¶11. (SBU) Summary: According to November 10 and 11 local media reports, Government of National Unity (GNU) Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) Commissioner Hassabo Abdel-Rahman announced on UN-sponsored radio that the Sudanese government is planning to close Darfur internally displaced person (IDP) camps by early 2010. However, when Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (DSRSG) Ameerah Haq questioned the HAC Commissioner about the announcement, Hassabo claimed that he was misquoted and that returns would not be forced. In a November 16 meeting with members of the U.S. Special Envoy's (SE) office, Hassabo reiterated support for IDPs' voluntary choice to return but continued to outline only two choices for Darfuri IDPs, government-provided housing blocks or return to villages. The UN is considering issuing a statement emphasizing international standards for voluntary and appropriate returns. End summary.

¶12. (U) According to English-language media outlets Sudan Tribune and Khartoum Monitor, Hassabo announced to UN-sponsored Miraya FM radio on November 10 that the Sudanese government plans to close IDP camps in the greater Darfur region by early 2010. The independent, Arabic-language daily Al-Sahafa quoted the HAC Commissioner as stating that the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs is "converting aid money to a service program to rehabilitate villages." According to the Al-Sahafa report, the government is constructing 20,000 housing units for IDPs in El Fasher, North Darfur; El Geneina, West Darfur; and Nyala, South Darfur. (Note: None of the media reports clearly indicates whether the government construction campaign will include a total of 60,000 units, with 20,000 in each state, or only a total of 20,000 units. In either case, the government's proposed housing units, if constructed, would provide housing for a very small proportion of the IDP population, currently estimated at 2.7 million individuals. End note).

¶13. (U) In addition, the Miraya FM report indicates that Hassabo outlined two choices for IDPs, either to return to villages of origin or move into new housing complexes. Hassabo did not specify the consequences for rejecting these options. The Sudan Tribune and Khartoum Monitor reports include strong statements from armed opposition group leaders condemning the HAC announcement.

¶14. (SBU) On November 12, USAID Mission Director William Hammink discussed the recent media reports with DSRSG Ameerah Haq. DSRSG Haq had approached Hassabo regarding the announcement on November 11, and the HAC Commissioner confirmed announcing the construction of housing units in the Darfur capitals but strongly denied that the government intended to force IDPs to return to villages of origin or move to the housing units. Hassabo asserted that Miraya FM had misquoted him and affirmed to DSRSG Haq the importance of voluntary

and appropriate returns. The DSRSG also informed USAID that the UN is considering issuing a statement to emphasize international standards for voluntary and appropriate returns. In a November 16 meeting with SE office staff, Hassabo reiterated support for voluntary returns but continued to outline only two choices for Darfuri IDPs, government-provided housing blocks or return to villages. Hassabo requested additional donor support to rural areas to prevent IDPs from aborting returns in favor of camp services.

¶ 15. (SBU) Comment: The Sudanese government has made multiple attempts to dismantle large, urban camps in Darfur dating back to the onset of the Darfur crisis (see reftels). This latest media story on forced IDP returnees has been refuted by Mr. Hassabo, but it does indicate continued GOS intentions to force choices on the IDPs, i.e. government-provided housing in towns or return to villages of origin. Post continues to urge the Sudanese government to abide by international principles for returns and closely monitor the situation.

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